



The New Jersey
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PRESS RELEASE

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Halloween Warning from Ophthalmologists: Over-the-Counter Contact Lenses Could Contain Dangerous Chemicals

The New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmology urges costume shoppers to stay away from non-prescription lenses after study finds chlorine, metal during product testing.

Trenton, NJ – October 22, 2015 – Wearing costume contact lenses on Halloween can be a real scream. However, the scare from non-prescription contact lenses can be all too real when chemical exposure or potentially blinding infections take place. To help prevent eye damage and vision loss, the [New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmology](http://www.njao.org), along with the American Academy of Ophthalmology, is warning costume shoppers about over-the-counter decorative lenses after a recent study found that several varieties tested positive for chlorine and other harmful chemicals.

Research published in September found chlorine in three types of non-prescription costume contact lenses.¹ Iron was found on four pairs of lenses. The chemicals may come from colorants used to tint and create playful patterns on the lenses. One pair seeped chlorine after a routine rinse, prompting concern from researchers about toxicity to the eye. The study also noted that colorants printed or pressed onto some decorative lenses create an uneven texture. Those rough surfaces could scratch the eyes, potentially allowing in bacteria that can cause infection and even blindness.

Four of the five lenses in the study are not available legally in the United States because they are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Despite that sales restriction, many decorative lenses of unknown origin can be bought online. Around Halloween, they often crop up for sale at beauty parlors or even gas stations. The problem is that contact lenses not approved by the FDA may be made with materials that can harm the eyes by causing [corneal ulcers](#) or [keratitis](#). Both of these conditions can result in scarring that impairs vision or causes blindness. For this reason, the Academy advises against wearing decorative lenses without a prescription.

“You can’t be sure what you’re getting when you buy over-the-counter contact lenses, which can be very dangerous to your eyes,” said ophthalmologist Thomas Steinemann, M.D., spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “If you want decorative contact lenses, get a prescription or steer clear of them. It’s not worth the risk to your vision.”

“The eyes are among the most sensitive parts of the body and are extremely delicate. Wearing contact lenses in general should not be taken lightly. In particular, using costume contact lenses to enhance an outfit may be tempting, but contact lenses really should not be considered as simple fashion accessories or makeup. They are medical devices that should be properly fit for each person and require a prescription from an eye care professional”, said Elena Drudy, President, New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmology.

Costume Contact Lens Safety Guidelines

To safely wear decorative contact lenses this Halloween or any time of year, the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) recommends following these guidelines:

- Only buy decorative contact lenses from retailers who require a prescription and sell FDA-approved products.
- If you don't already have a contact lens prescription, obtain a valid prescription and eye exam from an ophthalmologist – a medical doctor who treats eye conditions and diseases – or optometrist.
- Even those with perfect vision need to get examined and fitted for the right size contacts by an eye health professional. Ill-fitting lenses can scratch the surface of the eye, creating an opening for infection.
- Redness, swelling, excessive discharge, pain or discomfort can signal eye infection. If you have these symptoms, immediately see an ophthalmologist. Eye infections can cause blindness if left untreated.

For more information on [costume contact lenses](#), visit the Academy's public information website, www.geteyesmart.org.

Members of the press who wish to speak with contact lens experts or [patients who have suffered vision loss or blindness from costume contact lenses](#) can contact the Academy's Public Relations Department at media@ao.org.

About New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmology

The New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmology (NJAO) is an organization of over 300 practicing, board certified ophthalmologists -- the only member of the eye care team who is an Eye MD. NJAO advocates the uniqueness of the profession of ophthalmology by educating both its members and the public in order to enable ophthalmologists to provide the highest quality of service to the public. The New Jersey Academy of Ophthalmologists is committed to advocating on behalf of its patients and to promoting patient safety and protecting the welfare of the people of New Jersey.

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¹ [Scanning Electron Microscopy Findings with Energy-Dispersive X-ray Investigations of Cosmetically Tinted Contact Lenses](#), *Eye & Contact Lens*, Sept. 2015